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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES INCLUDING PALESTINE

Written statement submitted by the International Federation Terre des Hommes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[29 January 1992]

1. The International Federation Terre des Hommes is most concerned about the situation of violence that prevails in the territories occupied by Israel. Indeed, the situation seems hardly to have improved despite the faint glimmer of hope engendered by the recent multilateral negotiations on the Middle East.

2. The violence and coercion used by the Israeli Government against Palestinians appears to be a natural consequence of a much more far-reaching plan to settle and, ultimately, annex the occupied territories. The management of water, which is the source of life, is completely under the control of the Israeli authorities. Water is unfairly distributed as Israeli citizens use 80 per cent of the water from the West Bank.

3. The way in which the Israelis manage the water has inhibited the development of Palestinian agriculture. Since 1967, the authorities have virtually prohibited the digging of new wells by Palestinians and have at the same time demolished existing reservoirs and blocked and diverted natural

springs. Lastly, because of the decline in their incomes, many Palestinians are unable to pay their water bills and as a result some of the villages on the West Bank have had their water cut off by the Israeli Water Company. Thus, over the years, the Palestinians in the occupied territories have seen virtually the only natural resource available to them become scarcer and scarcer and now they have lost all control over it.

4. As regards health, the situation is just as difficult. For example, it is still illegal for the residents of the West Bank to travel to Jerusalem without prior authorization, which is often refused by the military authorities. This has a serious impact on the health of the residents because the three main treatment centres in the occupied territories are in Jerusalem, and a permit is therefore required to reach them.

5. For a long time now, the Palestinians' right to health has been violated, and health care professionals and medical facilities are the most frequent targets of attack by the Government forces. In July 1991, the Israeli army attacked several medical clinics run by Palestinian medical organizations operating in the rural areas. Over a period of two months, at least 10 clinics run by local medical committees were attacked. Army units burst into the premises, evicted the staff and sometimes confiscated their identity papers. The patients, some of whom were sick children, were ordered to leave the clinic; the pretext given for the attacks was that their taxes were overdue. The truth is that these measures are part of a policy of interfering with the system of regular health care which Palestinian NGOs are providing for the residents of the occupied territories, who have many children.

6. On 3 October 1991, a similar incident occurred at the Zababdeh treatment centre. Four Israeli soldiers took up position at the centre, ordering it to be closed and all the patients evacuated. On 6 October, the decision to close the clinic was confirmed by the Qabatia military authorities but they refused to produce a written order. The closure of this centre deprived a population of 22,000 of basic health care. As a result of internal pressure, the Zababdeh clinic was temporarily re-opened on 10 October 1991.

7. In 1991, a study on primary health care was conducted in the Ramallah region, which has 103 health centres, 21 of which are administered by the Government, 6 by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 59 by national and international NGOs and 17 by private doctors. According to this study, 15 per cent of the residents of the region contribute to the Government sickness insurance scheme but only 4 per cent actually benefit from it. Eighty-nine per cent of the population has access to regular immunization services. The Government clinics do not provide specialist care, which is almost always offered by the NGO clinics. Eighty-six per cent of these clinics have running water, 14 per cent have no articles for personal hygiene and 13 per cent have no sanitation. Lastly, many of the centres lack medical equipment and supplies.

8. During the last 24 years, the percentage of Government clinics operating in the Ramallah region has fallen from 58 to 20. These clinics service 18 per cent of the total monthly case-load in the region. Finally, 48 per cent of the clinics in existence today were built over the last four years but, only one of them was built by the Government. It is therefore

obvious that if the health of the residents of the Ramallah region is being maintained at a satisfactory level, it is partly due to the work of the national and international NGOs, and in particular, of the Palestinian medical organizations which are being constantly hampered in the performance of their duties.

9. In conclusion, the International Federation Terre des Hommes recommends that the Commission on Human Rights should call upon the Government of Israel:

(a) to put an end to the discriminatory measures against Palestinians and to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to live in dignity,

(b) to recognize and uphold the efforts being made by Palestinian organizations to establish a minimum social infrastructure and to stop harassing health professionals,

(c) to speed up its efforts to find a peaceful and negotiated settlement to the Middle East crisis.